

SUDA entry iota 229: Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ θεὸς ἡμῶν (Jesus the Christ and our God)

[Note] that in the time of the most pious emperor Justinian^[1] there was a certain man, leader of the Jews -- Theodosius was his name -- who was well known to most of the Christians and to the aforementioned faithful emperor himself. At that time there was a certain Christian man -- Philip was his name -- a silver merchant by trade. This man being well acquainted with Theodosius and maintaining a genuine [friendship] with him, counseled him and advised him to become a Christian. So on one day the aforesaid Philip said something like this to the aforesaid Theodosius: "Why ever, as you are a wise man and accurately understand what the Law and the Prophets have proclaimed in advance about the Lord Christ, do you not believe in him and become a Christian? For I am convinced about you, that it is not because you are ignorant of what the god-inspired Scriptures have foretold concerning the coming of our common master Christ that you decline to become a Christian. Make haste therefore to save your soul, believing in our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, lest by remaining in your unbelief you make yourself subject to eternal judgment." When he heard these things which the Christian said to him, the Jew acknowledged him and thanked him in words and gave him this answer: "I acknowledge your godly love, that being zealous for the salvation of my soul you strive in urging me to become a Christian. Therefore, as before God who understands and observes the secrets of hearts, I will speak with you without deceit and without hypocrisy and with all truth. I am fully assured that the Christ came who was proclaimed in advance by the Law and the Prophets, the one who is worshipped by you Christians, and I confess it willingly, as to my genuine friend, you who are always eager for my benefit. But being governed by human reckoning I do not become a Christian and in this respect I condemn myself. For as it is, being a Jew I am the leader of the Jews and obtain great honor and many gifts and all the necessities for this life. I suspect that even if I become the patriarch of the catholic church or receive greater and more prominent authority from you [Christians], I will not be found worthy of such great service. Therefore, so that I may not lose those things which seem pleasurable in this life, I disregard the life to come, and I am wrong to do this. But so that I may prove my words true to you my beloved friend, I entrust a mystery to you which has been hidden by us Hebrews, from which we understand with certainty that the Christ who is worshipped by you Christians is the very one who was proclaimed in advance by the Law and the Prophets -- not only from those very prophecies, but also from the mystery which has been recorded and hidden by us. And this is the story of this mystery. In ancient times, when Jerusalem was newly founded, it was customary among the Jews to appoint priests in the Temple equal in number to our scriptures, which happen to be twenty-two; whence we number the inspired biblical books as twenty-two.^[2] So a codex was stored in the Temple, in which was written the name of each of the 22 priests and the name of his father and his mother. So when one of the priests died, the rest assembled in the Temple and by a common vote appointed another priest in the place of the one who had died, completing the number of the 22 priests. And it was recorded in the codex that on this day such-and-such a priest died, the son of this man and this woman, and in his place so-and-so was elected. So as this custom prevailed among the nation of the Jews, it happened in the days when Jesus was living in Judaea that one of the 22 priests died before Jesus began to make himself known and to teach men to believe in him. So the remaining priests assembled in order to make another priest in the place of the priest who had died. As each proposed the one who seemed to him worthy of becoming [a priest], the others rejected him as being deficient in virtue, from which a priest ought to be established. For if he was wise, and good in character and way of life, but happened to be ignorant of the Law and the Prophets, he was judged unsuitable for the priesthood. Thus when many priests had come to the vote and all had been rejected, one priest rose and stood in the midst of them and said to the others, 'Look, many have been named by you and have been found unfit for the priesthood. Accept me also, therefore, as I speak about one man who ought to be elected in the place of the priest who has died. For I suspect that none of you will be displeased with the nomination

which comes from me.' When the other priests bade him, he said, 'In the place of the priest who has died I want Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter, to become priest. He is young in years, but he is adorned in speech, in manner of life, and in good character; and I suspect that no man ever has been seen in speech or in manner of life or in character such as this man is. And I suppose that this is known to all of you who live in Jerusalem and undeniable.' Hearing this speech, the other priests accepted the man and ratified the election, saying that Jesus was suitable for the priesthood beyond any other man. But some said about him that he was not from the tribe of Levi, but from the tribe of Judah. And thinking that he was the son of Joseph (for so he was named among the Jews), everyone bore witness that Joseph was from the tribe of Judah, not from the tribe of Levi. And for this reason, because they thought he was not of the Levitical tribe, they tried to prevent him from becoming priest. But the priest who had named him answered them and said that his lineage was mixed; for long ago in the ancient generations a mixing of the two tribes had occurred and from that the lineage of Joseph had descended. Hearing this the other priests acceded to the election, and by a common agreement all the assembled priests agreed to appoint Jesus as priest in place of the priest who had died. As it was customary to record in the codex not only the name of the man who was becoming priest but also [the names] of his father and mother, some said that they ought first to call his parents and learn their names from them, and to receive a statement from them, whether the man who was elected to the priesthood was their son. And all agreed to this. He who had nominated Jesus to become priest said that Joseph the father of Jesus had died, and only his mother still lived. So all agreed to bring his mother into the council and learn from her whether she happened to be the mother of Jesus and if she herself had given birth to him, and to hear the name of her husband, from whom she had borne Jesus. As this was agreeable to all, they summoned the mother of Jesus and said to her, 'Since so-and-so the priest has died, the son of such a man and such a woman, and we wish in his place to make your son Jesus [priest], and it is the custom to record the name of the father and the mother: tell us, if Jesus is your son, and if you gave birth to him.' And when Mary heard this she replied, saying to the priests, 'I confess that Jesus is my son, for I bore him, and those [men] who have been found and those women who have been found will bear witness that I bore him. But that he does not have a father on earth, accept assurance from me as you wish. For as I was a virgin and living in Galilee, an angel of God, when I was awake and not sleeping, entering the house where I was, proclaimed the good news to me that I would bear a son from the Holy Spirit. He bade me call his name Jesus. So, you see, being a virgin, after I saw this vision I conceived and bore Jesus, remaining a virgin until this day even after I gave birth.' Hearing this the priests ordered trustworthy midwives to come and instructed them to investigate whether Mary was still truly a virgin. Obtaining evidence from the facts they confirmed the assurance that she was a virgin. Those who had been present and observed her giving birth also came and bore witness that Jesus was her son. The priests, amazed at what was said by Mary and those who bore witness concerning her childbirth, answered and said to Mary, 'Tell us frankly, so that we may hear it from your mouth, of what father and mother is he the son, so that we may record him so; for whatever parents you say we will record and no others.' She answered and said, 'In truth I bore him, not knowing a father on earth for him; but I heard from the angel that he was the son of God. So he is the son of me, the woman called Mary, and the son of God, and I have not married and am a virgin.' Hearing this, the priests brought the codex and wrote thus: 'On this day the priest so-and-so died, the son of such a father and such a mother, and by the common vote of all of us Jesus became priest, the son of the living God and Mary the virgin.' And this codex was saved from the Temple by the care of those who held first place among the Jews at the time of the capture of the Temple and of Jerusalem, and is stored at Tiberias. And this mystery is known to very few trustworthy men of our nation. Therefore it was revealed also to me as a leader and teacher of our nation. For not only from the Law and the Prophets are we fully assured that the Christ worshiped by you Christians is the very son of the living God, who came to earth for the salvation of the world, but also from the record which is preserved to this day and is stored at Tiberias." When the Christian heard what was said to him by the Jew, moved by holy zeal he said to the Jew, "Straightway and at once I am bringing to the faithful and pious emperor what you have said, so that he may send to

Tiberias and reveal the codex which you describe, to refute the unbelief of the Jews." But the Jew said to the Christian, "Why do you wish to bring judgment on your own soul and bring it to the emperor without attaining what you desire? For if some such thing should happen, a great war is going to take place, and slaughter will follow. And then, if they see themselves being subdued, they will set fire to the place in which the codex is stored; and our efforts will be in vain when what we strive for does not succeed, as we merely become agents of the shedding of blood. I have made this known to you my dearly beloved, as to a genuine friend, in order to prove to you that it is not out of ignorance that I reject Christianity, but out of empty opinion." When the Christian heard this from the Jew, believing that what he said was true, he did not make this discourse known to the faithful emperor Justinian, lest moved by holy zeal that great and faithful emperor should cause shedding of blood to occur, and then not even what he desired would have succeeded; but to many of his acquaintances and friends he made this discourse evident. When we had learned this from those who heard it from the aforementioned silver-merchant Philip, we gave it not a little attention, wishing to know whether indeed the Jew had spoken these words truly about this record. So we found Josephus, the historian of the capture of Jerusalem[3] (of whom Eusebius the [spiritual son] of Pamphilus[4] makes much mention in his *Ecclesiastical History*), saying openly in his memoirs of his captivity that Jesus served in the holy place with the priests. When we found this told by Josephus, a man of ancient times who lived not long after the apostles, we sought to find also from the inspired Scriptures the confirmation of such a discourse. So we found in the Gospel according to Luke that Jesus went into the synagogue of the Jews and the Book was given to him and he read the prophet Isaiah saying, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; for this cause he anointed me, he sent me to preach good news to the poor." [5] We judge by analogy that if Christ Jesus did not have some liturgical rank among the Jews the Book would not have been given to him to read in the hearing of the people. For among us Christians in the Church no one is permitted to read the books of the inspired Scriptures to the people unless he is enrolled in the clergy. Both from what Josephus wrote and from what the evangelist Luke recounted we know that when Theodosius the Jew told the aforesaid tale to the above-mentioned Philip the silver-merchant, he did not invent this, but truly as to a genuine friend he entrusted the mystery which had been hidden by the Jews.

But Chrysostom does not at all accept this priesthood attributed to Christ.[6]

Notes

Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca ed.3 (1957, reprinted 1986) 3 no.17b (p. 118); cf. Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina* 60 ff.

The Latin translation of this entry made in the 13th century by Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, achieved a wide circulation and was translated into Old French (Berschin p. 250).

[1] See generally iota 446.

[2] Perhaps the number 22 is obtained by counting 5 books of the Law (the Pentateuch) and 17 books of the Prophets.

[3] On Josephus, see iota 503 and iota 504.

[4] On Eusebius, see epsilon 3737.

[5] *Luke* 4:18, quoting *Isaiah* 61:1.